



The Lindbergh Baby Kidnapping: The History of One of 20th Century America's Most Notorious Crimes

Charles River Editors

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*Includes pictures *Includes accounts of the crime and trial *Includes online resources and a bibliography for further reading *Includes a table of contents

“I am writing this literally within the shadow of the electric chair. For upward to fourteen months I have been confined in the cell nearest to the execution chamber in the New Jersey penitentiary. The courts of New Jersey have now said that I shall die on the night of April 3, and that I shall die in the chair that is just beyond the door that faces me and has faced me every waking hour of my life these past fourteen months. The courts have said that on the night of April 3 I shall be prepared to leave the cell which has been my home; walk through the door which has been facing me these weary months; tread the few steps that lead from that door to the electric chair; that on that night I shall be led out on a walk from which I shall never return.” – Bruno Richard Hauptmann

Amelia Earhart once noted, "In my life I had come to realize that when things were going very well indeed it was just the time to anticipate trouble." And so it would be with America's other famous aviator. Charles Lindbergh had spent the first 30 years of his life escaping multiple plane crashes, becoming a hero across the world, and starting a family, but his luck ran out in an awful way in March of 1932. Tragically, the other major life event associated with Charles Lindbergh besides his historic transatlantic flight was "the crime of the century." On March 1, 1932, 20 month old Charles, Jr. was kidnapped right out of his crib from the family's home in rural East Amwell, New Jersey, and for 10 long weeks, the nation hoped and prayed in chorus with the distraught parents for his safe return. Both Charles and his pregnant wife Anne made frequent, public pleas for their son's safe return, while ransom negotiations took place between a self-identified kidnapper and Dr. John F. Condon, a volunteer intermediary. On April 2, the Lindbergh family paid a ransom of \$50,000 in exchange for information about the child's whereabouts, but the information was false. The mystery continued until May 12, when a passing trucker found the corpse of a dead toddler by chance in the woods outside of Mount Rose, New Jersey. Through careful investigation, the police were able to arrest Bruno Richard Hauptmann for the crime about 30 months later, after they tracked some of the money paid through the ransom to a gas station in Manhattan. Hauptmann still had more than \$13,000 of the ransom hidden in his garage when authorities closed in. Following his six-week long trial in for kidnapping and murder in early 1935, the jury found him guilty on all counts and Judge Thomas Trenchard sentenced him to death by electrocution, which was carried out on April 3, 1936 at Trenton State Penitentiary. Unfortunately, the kidnapping of his son became more than just a personal matter for Charles Lindbergh; over the next several years, it evolved in his mind to a dislike of America in general. It is almost as if, unable to accept the role that his personal popularity and fame played in the tragedy, Lindbergh chose instead to blame those who made him famous and popular. In an extremely emotional interview with his friend, reporter Lauren Lyman, he said, "We Americans are a primitive people. We do not have discipline. Our moral standards are low. It shows up in the private lives of people we know — their drinking and 'behavior with women.' It shows in the newspapers, the morbid curiosity over crimes and murder trials. Americans seem to have little respect for law, or the rights of others." In a perfect world, or even simply one not on the brink of war, his remarks might have been forgotten, or at the very least heard with a sympathetic ear as the rantings of a grieving father. However, they would be quoted again and again in future years, coming to epitomize the world's view of Lindbergh's politics and values.

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